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# ARTS & DECORATION



TRUE LOVE. By Sir Thomas Lawrence, R. A.

ADAM BUDGE, INCORPORATED  
NEW YORK AND LONDON

NOVEMBER, 1917  
PRICE 25 CENTS

*(Statue, Barnard)*

## THE LINCOLN DISCUSSION

THE newspapers, and two art magazines especially, during the last two or three months have been debating the advisability of sending George Gray Barnard's Lincoln to London. The discussion sometimes came to blows which if they were not physical were figuratively solid enough. Whether it is a tempest in a teapot or not is questionable. We confess with neither shame nor reluctance that we have seen only reproductions of Mr. Barnard's statue. It suggests in the reproduction something of that Gothic spirit so well realized in Rodin's Bourgeois de Calais. It suggests then something of the spirit of Lincoln. It seems to us that this portrait should represent, more than Lincoln the body, the ideas for which he stood. Few of us, for one reason, are readers of character. That is the business of the portraitist who is also a psychologist and most assuredly not a camera. The reports of the camera say nothing to our ignorant eyes. The best photograph of Mr. Lincoln, did we know nothing of him, would mean nothing to us. We should think through it of a funny gentleman in the funny clothes that the "tasteless" people of 1850 and '60, for some unaccountable reason, consented to wear. We have seen many men who, more or less, resembled him in the old family albums which we used to laugh over.

The discussion is for and against Mr. Barnard's Lincoln. The fight is so violent and inconsidered on one side that we find that even Theodore Roosevelt and Charles Dana Gibson and the editor of some small paper in the country somewhere are used to add volume and, incomprehensively, authority to its argument. And on the other side so violent that Mr. Lincoln's son, at best not much more than human, has been quoted. Now Mr. Lincoln's son states, in more and different words, that this is not a literal portrait. He undoubtedly owns photographs that would prove his argument. It is very possible also that Mr. Lincoln, inheriting something from his mother, likes to think of his father as a polished gentleman. (We all have our vanities.) We do not think of him that way; some of us do not think of him as a man at all. We conceive him rather as a mighty spirit for good, a gnarled oak that rooted in earth, alone, and suffering there in a time of terrific violence, knew what was best for the earth. A sensitive figure for the horrors it went through left indelible marks, a strong figure for it was able to counteract the pull of its sufferings with the push of a remedy. This figure is not the figure of a polished gentleman. The clothes he wears do not matter. The last of his shoes is apart from the question. Whether his back was bent or straight, his poise elegant or vulgar, the number of moles on his face one or ten, is irrelevant. We do not want a literal picture of the

body, a literal picture—a puzzle which we cannot solve. What we do want is a picture of the significant soul within the insignificant frame.

What we want is a figure which shall represent the soul and not a bit of literal camouflage, mathematically, historically or locally accurate, a family album figure. What we really want is a permanent picture of the soul and the soul, because the soul alone is immortal. The body was not very strong—a gun in the hands of a crazy actor destroyed it forever. It is dust now. But the soul is as alive and fresh and vigorous to-day as it ever was; and it is this, this mighty influence, the real Lincoln, that we should want England to know and to admire. Whether Mr. Barnard's figure will or will not accomplish this end we are not prepared to say. We know the figure only in reproduction. Like the Bourgeois of Calais it seems to have something in it of the grotesque. To the eyes of his contemporaries the figure of Lincoln had something in it of the grotesque. It was not of those figures, and the figure as a soul, by which polished gentlemen are recognized; one of those figures turned out like sausages in a regular mould. Lord Chesterfield, with the sculptor-editor who would have it refined or improved, would certainly have found fault with his manner of entering a drawing room. But Lord Chesterfield preceded the advent of democracy, of a time when men of no refined antecedents could become the heads of nations. Men, in his time, were not judged as men—they were judged as gentlemen. Lincoln was a solitary figure—that alone would make him grotesque. He loved mankind common or preferred—that alone would make him vulgar. We are speaking socially and conventionally with Mr. Ruckstuhl. Socially it is theoretically all right to love mankind, it is socially all wrong to love it practically.

To love it practically is not a matter of beautifully worded phrases, of fine sentiment well clothed; it is to remember that some men eat dinner in red undershirts, that some are unashamed of dirty hands and dull brains; it is then to contain within oneself a strain of vulgarity, a strain that will not be nauseated by the smell and the manners of the unwashed and not be disgusted by the stupidity of deadened wits. Mr. Lincoln championed even the negroes, the negroes when, as slaves, they were not above the social level of cattle. It is rather curious to have the one portrait of a democrat, the portrait of the one democrat in a democracy, the one real commoner, berated because it does not present him as a gentleman equaling every other gentleman in elegance; berating it, that means, because it does not show him aping the academic manners of his inferiors.

G. P. B.